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SUBJECT: SERBIA: REFUGEE COORDINATOR WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT: APRIL
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KOSOVO MINISTRY: U.S., EU TO BLAME FOR FAILURE OF RETURNS

¶1. (SBU) On April 11, refcoord participated in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) bi-monthly Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) working group featuring the Kosovo Ministry's Coordination Center President Vuko Antonijevic. Participants included a number of IDP associations. The session focused on the future of Serb returns to Kosovo. Antonijevic (DSS) blamed the international community, particularly the United States and European Union, for the failure of Serb returns to Kosovo. "The U.S. and EU want to see an ethnically cleansed, independent Kosovo and we cannot close our eyes to this. The United States is the most responsible for the lack of return. The assistance money it provides for return is spent on strategy and planning, rather than actual return," Antonijevic said. He said the GOS would continue to "insist on return of all Kosovo Serbs to Kosovo." Antonijevic added that even though UNHCR statistics indicate 16,000 Serbs had returned to Kosovo, the figure was inflated and that in reality only 2,000 to 3,000 Serbs had actually returned and stayed in Kosovo. "The international community has done everything in its power to discourage returns in order to justify the independence of Kosovo," he said. He also faulted Kosovo authorities and Kosovo Albanians for low returns figures. "There have been 7,108 ethnically motivated attacks on Serbs since 1999, not to mention the looting of Serb property and destroying of churches, monasteries and cemeteries. All of this has contributed to the failure of returns," he said.

ANTONIJEVIC: JOVANOVIC WRONGFULLY DETAINED

¶2. (SBU) Referring to the March 12 arrest in Kosovo of IDP Serb Momcilo Jovanovic while participating in a UNHCR funded Danish Refugee Council (DRC) go-and-see visit (GSV,) Antonijevic said Jovanovic was wrongfully detained and that UNHCR and DRC were responsible for his arrest. Turning to face UNHCR Serbia Representative Lennart Kotsalainen, he said, "You have to ensure the security of GSV participants because there is no rule of law in Kosovo and no one there respects individual rights. Why have you not done more for him? He is not a criminal. He was

arrested so he could be prevented from returning." Antonijevic said the Kosovo Ministry had spent 5,000 euros on Jovanovic's legal representation thus far.

NO SOUL, NO SPIRIT FOR SERBIA WITHOUT KOSOVO

13. (SBU) Antonijevic said that Kosovo declared independence to prevent Serbs from returning. He questioned how viable Kosovo independence could be if only "146,000 Serbs live in Kosovo, compared to 300,000 in 1999." Serbia would never give up its quest to keep Kosovo as part of its territory and affirmed his own family would forever remain in Kosovo, Antonijevic said, adding that "without Krajina and without Republica Srpska we are fine. Without Kosovo, we have no soul, no spirit." Antonijevic remarked sarcastically that it was a coincidence that Carla Del Ponte released her book, which cites Albanian violence toward Serbs, immediately following Kosovo declaration.

14. (SBU) Antonijevic said that nothing had changed in Kosovo since 1999 in terms of security, freedom of movement, access to employment, property restitution, or housing reconstruction for Serbs in Kosovo. He said that only Albanian homes had been reconstructed and that there was never enough money for Serb homes. Though he conceded that all stakeholders, including the GOS were responsible for the lack of progress in these areas, the GOS was "the least responsible." He lauded Russia for its recent donation of humanitarian assistance for Serb enclaves in Kosovo, calling Support from Russia "very encouraging."

FRUSTRATED IDPS DEMAND TO KNOW GOS PLANS, INTENTIONS

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15. (SBU) IDPs expressed frustration that neither Antonijevic nor his staff made themselves available to answer questions after the session on GOS plans for the future of IDPs. "Antonijevic's comments were predictable. I could have read everything he said in the newspaper. You cannot call this a dialogue. I think we deserve to know what our government not just the international community is planning for us," one IDP said. Nada Culjak-Banjac of the Balkan Center for Migration, a local NGO that provides free legal assistance to IDPs and refugees, said that Antonijevic's comments and his refusal to questions from session participants outraged her. "Antonievic told us he is pro-return, but he did not share a plan for the how the Kosovo Ministry intends to make returns happen. We, as IDP representatives, have a right to ask the government what its true intentions are. What is the plan? If return is not possible let's say so and help IDPs move on with their lives," she said. Culjak-Banjac said it was also important to identify IDPs who were willing to return to and accept an independent Kosovo.

MERCK DONTATES 9,800 EUROS IN MEDICINE TO UNHCR

16. (SBU) Serbia Country Manager for Merck Sharp & Dohme

Pharmaceutical Gabriel Dina informed refcoord April 18 the company had donated medicine to UNHCR's Health Unit totaling 9,800 euros. Refcoord had introduced Dina to UNHCR in late 2007 and following his visit to several collective centers, UNHCR provided him with a list of medications for extremely vulnerable and ailing IDPs and refugees. Dina told refcoord that he was working with Merck's corporate foundation on "something of bigger scope and impact."

CHURCH WORLD SERVICE TO APPLY FOR PRM FY08 FUNDING CYCLE

¶7. (U) On April 17, refcoord met with Church World Service (CWS) Regional Coordinator, Vitali Vorona, to discuss CWS interest in PRM's FY2008 open call for NGO programs benefiting refugees and internally displaced persons in the Balkans. Vorona said that he planned to submit a proposal focused on income generation (small grants and micro-credit loans) and legal assistance for IDPs. CWS will target Belgrade-based Roma for the project. Vorona told refcoord that one of the proposal's objectives would be to monitor the pace of Roma primary school enrollment and attendance for children of project beneficiaries. CWS has a regional presence and implements projects in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and Georgia. Vorona said PRM previously funded CWS activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) Antonijevic is one of the last in a series of GOS employees to trot out the shopworn complaints about minimal levels of returns and blame. Nevertheless, the GOS has done precious little to facilitate or fund returns, while dedicating scant support for displaced persons who want to stay in Serbia. Had he given us the opportunity to ask, we would have been prepared to comment on the robust USG return-related assistance in the Balkans over the past decade. End Comment.

MUNTER